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**At the Ghost Hour  
The House of the  
UNBELIEVING  
THOMAS**

**TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN OF**

**PAUL HEYSE**

**BY**

**FRANCIS A. VAN SANTFORD**

**WITH DECORATIONS BY  
ALICE C. MORSE**

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## THE HOUSE OF THE UNBELIEVING THOMAS

In a provincial town of northern Germany there is a street in which the ancient, high-gabled houses bear, inscribed in Gothic letters, upon the lintels of their doors or upon little sandstone tablets, such honorable or fanciful names as "The Good Shepherd," "Noah's Dove," "The Palms of Peace," "The Rose of Sharon," and underneath, the date of their erection.

In former days this street had been one of the main arteries of the city, whose staid, orthodox inhabitants coveted inward spiritual illumination rather than the light and air which penetrate from without. Since then new generations had arisen, fired with the spirit of aggressive enlightenment, and the importance of these old families, content with the stray sunbeams that made their way over the tall roofs, had declined perceptibly. One by one, they had died off behind their "Palms of Peace" and their "Roses of Sharon," and had made way for the bustling children of the new era, whose light and cheerful dwellings sprang up around the dingy old street.

From one of the houses, which had grown almost black under the storms of three centuries, the street had received its name. Upon a block of stone above the wide entrance there were cut, in letters so weather-worn as to be scarcely legible, these words: "The Unbelieving Thomas, 1534." From this, the street had been christened Thomas Lane--a title which it still bears, though, only in official documents and on the map of the city. In common parlance it had been known for more than fifty years as "Ghosts' Lane"--again because of that same ancient building which was responsible for its correct name. For every one knew that the house of "The Unbelieving Thomas" was haunted; and even the most cold-blooded free-thinkers of the town could not escape a slight shiver when business forced them to tread the neglected pavement of this street.



Why this old three-storied structure, so firm despite its great age, had been inhabited all these years only by poor unabsolved souls, no one could tell. With one man who had had the hardihood to purchase the house, things had turned out badly enough. A Jew, to whom the great, empty rooms seemed suitable for a warehouse, had been established there less than two years, when one morning he was found with a bit of silk stuff twisted about his neck, hanging from the crosspiece of a window in the largest room. And it subsequently became evident that Fortune had turned her back upon this man, once prosperous and well-to-do, and there was nothing for him

but to steal out of the world and leave his accumulation of debts behind him.

Nothing save the house itself and its dusty furnishings remained to the creditors; and as no purchaser appeared, they were forced to vent their chagrin in fierce glances at the gray, weather-beaten sign over the door, upon which, in huge black lettering, was the name of the firm: "Commission and Dispatch House of Moritz Feigenbaum."



Now, although the whole house was so securely bolted and barred that it would have been impossible for a thief to carry anything out of it, the court deemed it necessary to provide for some oversight of the place, so that no lovers of darkness, counterfeiters or bands of dynamiters should take refuge there. Fortunately, there happened to be a poor cobbler, whose little house had been destroyed by a flood, and who declared himself willing to undertake the duties of janitor. This valiant person--Wenzel Kospoth by name, an emigrant from Bohemia--took possession of the porter's room by the entrance without further delay, regarding this free shelter as a sufficient recompense for his services, which were simple enough. He had to open the great, black, outer door each morning, and to close it again at night; and now and then he took a survey of the three stories to see that no bulging wall threatened the downfall of the whole. The entire day he was free to devote to his small custom, which remained true to him, even in the haunted house; although certain anxious good wives had scruples about venturing across the threshold to get a pair of defective boots mended in this unwholesome atmosphere.



For, in fact, honest Wenzel Kospoth, with his bony, grizzled face and small, black eyes, deep-set under their bushy brows, did not seem quite canny to his new neighbors, hardened though they were to the traditions of the street.



As he took but little sleep, they could often see him, through the window of the ground floor, squatted on his low stool, his lank arms, in their shirt-sleeves, braced upon his knees, and lying open on his leather apron a large, old-time book, in which he would read industriously until long after midnight, by the light of his little lamp. It was only an old Bohemian Bible, which he could now understand with difficulty, for he had crossed the German border when only a lad. Those who spied upon him, however, regarded the copper-bound volume as a book of magic, and believed nothing less than that this singular stranger with the foreign name had taken the post of janitor in the haunted house that he might conduct there, undisturbed, his magical intercourse with evil spirits.



Wenzel Kospoth, when told of this report, laughed in his gray beard, and muttered something in Bohemian, which might have meant either yes or no. In his inmost soul he had a contempt for the stupid Germans, and fancied that this very Bible reading made him greatly their superior; so that, far from dispelling their superstitions, he seized upon an accidental opportunity to strengthen them.

An old acquaintance of his whom he had met in his Sunday walks to a neighboring village had come to want through no fault of her own. She was a little woman of about forty, who, though brought up in town, had, when quite young, married a peasant's son--a drunkard, as it proved. He had squandered all her small savings, and dying suddenly, had left her with a six-year-old child. As she was clever at sewing, the young widow earned many a pretty groschen as village tailoress.

But, unfortunately, her good heart led her to apply her skill not only to the needs of the outer, but to those of the inner man as well, and to dispose of her little store of recipes for all possible ailments in return for a trifling compensation. In this way she soon gained considerable patronage and, at the same time, with several of the more narrow-minded villagers, the reputation of being mistress of the black art. And when her little daughter had blossomed into a trim young maiden, with sparkling black eyes and waving yellow braids, who turned the heads of the village lads as she walked with her mother to church, on Sundays and feast days, the two came to be looked upon as a pair of unmistakable witches by the spiteful old women of the village, and by the younger ones whose sweethearts had become a trifle less devoted.



The two innocent souls endured all this patiently until one day an influential peasant in whose stalls several cows had suddenly died, at the instigation of his wicked wife, burst into Frau Cordula's house, and hurling a volley of reproaches upon her as the author of his misfortune, delivered her such a heavy blow with his fist that from that day she was a cripple and could only move about with difficulty upon tottering feet.

The base miscreant departed triumphant; but his deed was the beginning of a series of tribulations--the fruit of woman's hate and envy--until the poor woman realized that she must seek safety behind the walls of a town if she would not endanger her own life and that of her child among these superstitious people.

She had only one acquaintance in the town, Wenzel Kospoth; and to him she sent letter asking whether he knew of some small lodging where she and her daughter could find a refuge and earn their bite of bread hidden from curious eyes.

Now, behind the haunted house was a gloomy little court in which stood a low stable, unused since the horses of Moritz Feigenbaum were sold. Above the stable the coachman and errand boy had lived in two large, low rooms, with a windowless loft adjoining, where hay and oats had been stored. A coach-house shut in the remainder of the court, in the centre of which a chestnut-tree, long dead, lifted its dark, leafless branches, where a flock of tumultuous sparrows bustled noisily all the day long.



These quarters were not calculated to allure tenants who were partial to light and air; and even the poor and unhoused would not risk an encounter with the ghost of the last inmate. So the mice held their revels undisturbed and feasted royally upon the oats in the granary.

But the cobbler when he had received Frau Cordula's message thought at once how excellently these lodgings were adapted for his friend. His request to the authorities that two shelterless women, for whose character he could vouch, be allowed to occupy the lodgings in the court at a trifling rental was granted; and one morning he set out for the village to assist the mother and daughter in their removal.

The two poor persecuted souls were glad to avail themselves of the refuge under Wenzel Kospoth's roof, despite its unsavory reputation. A wagon was loaded with their bedding and furniture. Upon a chest sat Frau Cordula, Gundula hovered near her, while the dark-looking Bohemian, who drove the horses himself, cracked his whip so vigorously that the assembled village population, which would have accompanied the exodus of the witch by caterwaulings, dared give rent to no more disrespectful noises than a few whistles.



Their entry into Thomas Lane was made quietly, though the report had spread in the neighborhood that a witch from the country was about to move into the haunted house. A crowd had assembled before the closed entrance; but a look somewhat like disappointment passed over their gaping faces when the young girl sprang down from the wagon and the older woman, with Kospoth's help, descended carefully from her high seat. They fancied the witch would have been older and more gruesome; and Gundelchen, with her laughing eyes and yellow braids, under the peasant's head-dress, excited almost a feeling of regret that the peaceful sleep of these two women was to be disturbed by nocturnal apparitions.

The girl's smile faded when she mounted the narrow stairs and cast her first look around. Their cottage had been no fairy bower, it is true; but the sunlight had shone into it, and green gardens and fields lay all about it. When, however, she saw her little mother sink down with a heavy sigh upon the dusty floor, she quickly recovered herself, threw her arms about the poor woman and carried her to a bench near the window where she could watch the sparrows in the top of the chestnut-tree. Then she began to talk so cheerfully that the mother took heart at last and only sighed softly now and then, as with tender eyes she watched the child busied in arranging the furniture in their new home.



By the next day the two rooms looked quite habitable. The young girl had gone early to the market and bought two cheap pots of flowers; she had brushed away the dust, had scrubbed the floors, and hung fresh curtains at the square windows before it was time to make the soup upon the little stove in the corner. When Wenzel Kospoth came in at noon to ask how it fared with his fellow-tenants, his eyes opened wide with astonishment to find everything so neat and comfortable. He must needs stop for dinner, and found the frugal meal far more toothsome than the food which a neighbor had been wont to serve him in his shop. So it came about that the cobbler dined with them regularly, and the small sum which he paid helped them with the rent.



That she could not hope for much custom in her new home, the sensible woman knew well enough. She understood only peasant fashions; and for her medicinal skill there was no demand. In her despondency, she almost regretted that she had availed herself of Master Kospoth's offer. But here Gundula came to her mother's rescue. She had inherited her cleverness in womanly handiwork; and she soon apprenticed herself to a dressmaker, under whom she took great pains to learn the city fashions. She showed herself so quick and skillful that after a few months she was employed in the houses of well-to-do families.

In time, many a piece of work was entrusted to her to finish. These she took home to her mother, who became once more cheerful, now that her hands were no longer idle; and when, at the end of the year, she could count a pretty little sum laid by in her stocking, she forgave the stupid peasants whose persecutions had made her life so wretched.

Yet even here, in the city, the reputation of holding converse with evil spirits clung to her; and inquisitive school-boys, who had once, goaded by insatiable curiosity, ventured through the doorway as far as the entrance to the court, pointed to the four small windows above the stable, with childish awe, and whispered in each other's ears all manner of goblin-tales of the Blockenberg and the Devil's dances. The most impudent among them finally took courage, called



with a loud, but trembling voice: "Old witch! Old witch!" in the quiet court, and threw a stone against the stable-door; whereupon the whole troop scattered in a hasty flight, while even the sparrows, terrified by the unwonted clamor, flew out from the dry branches of the chestnut with shrill cries.

That the witch remained invisible, added not a little to the superstitious dread in which she was held. Her child, however, was regarded by the neighbors with mingled sympathy and admiration. They could not understand how she kept her red cheeks and laughing eyes amid such depressing surroundings; they must say, that any one who had at his baptism renounced the devil and all his works, could hardly bring himself to marry a girl out of this haunted house. Yet they watched the graceful little figure as long as they could see her hat-ribbon wave in the wind, and her short skirt blow about her trim ankles.

So far, all seemed orderly and natural in the house of "The Unbelieving Thomas," and the report of ghostly rendezvous there seemed ill-founded. But the narrator of this true story is now, at last, forced to the confession that, in the closest proximity to these two innocent beings, there was installed a ghost, pure and simple, of whose presence neither the occupants of the house nor the dwellers in that street had the slightest intimation.



It is averred that the souls of the dead, when they leave their bodies, do not pass directly to heaven or hell; but, according to the Romish belief, into purgatory, there to await the day of judgment and the resurrection of the body; or, according to the Protestant confession, into an intermediate state, where they bide in a condition of uncertain expectancy, like that of earthly travelers in a way station. In this supernal region there prevails a certain monotony of existence unrelieved even by the arrival of newly-released souls who, for the most part, bear upon their pallid features the sorrowful trace of a reluctant parting.

It is true that spirits of the higher order, those who while yet upon earth were raised above the sordid misery of life, and who viewed all occurrences in the light of eternity, soon find their way about in the gray twilight of this aerial realm, and enjoy meeting a kindred soul now and then among the noiseless throng of disembodied spirits, and holding converse with those whom they had come to revere for their virtuous deeds during their earthly life. So that here, where perfect equality and universal brotherhood are generally supposed to hold sway, there is a line of distinction between the great and small, to which no one offers the least objection. For, as no outward advantage is attached to the greater prestige which the nobler souls enjoy, no one finds cause for envy in the exalted intercourse with which, their hours are filled; while the great majority long ardently for the coarser pleasures of their past life.



In this painless intermediate state, the more worthy or distinguished souls are pursued by only one annoyance, namely, the ever-increasing curiosity of those yet living upon earth, who delight to summon the spirits of great kings, sages and artists to compulsory interviews. This disgraceful amusement has been the fashion at intervals from time immemorial, as when, for example, the Witch of Endor summoned the spirit of the high priest Samuel to appear before Saul. But, in our own day, the inquisitive practice of drawing the veil from the mysteries of the other world has spread through a very wide circle, and no name, sounded down from past centuries, is too venerable for its owner to be assailed with questions through the medium of some tipping-table or hysterical young woman; or even to be constrained to appear personally in the transparent guise of his so-called astral body.



The aristocracy of the intermediate kingdom, after they had borne with this presumption for some time, at last bethought themselves of an innocent expedient which would secure them from further intrusion. They made inquiry among the ghostly masses whether there were any who would be willing to serve as their representatives in case of such demands, and to answer impertinent questions as seemed to them proper.

Now, as many of those who in life had known only selfish pleasures were already so wearied of this spiritual existence that they were ready to jump out of their skin (if they had had a skin), nothing could be more welcome than this proposition to mingle once more in mundane affairs, and to amuse themselves for a few hours with the fashionable play of question and answer.

That they had scant knowledge of the affairs of their famous associates disturbed them as little as it did those whom they were to represent. For it soon became evident that the questioners at tapping-tables and dark seances were in nowise offended by foolish answers, and received the most palpable nonsense which was whispered to them in the communications of spirits as profound, superhuman wisdom, which they interpreted according to their wishes. It is easy to pipe for him who loves to dance; and he who is determined to hold converse with Julius Cæsar, Plato or Beethoven, will hear, in the stammering utterances of some cartman with whom he has in some mysterious way put



himself *en rapport*, words of the sublimest import.

Several years ago, the town in which the scene of this story is laid was attacked with the fever of spiritualism. At first, people were content to move tables and produce rappings, but by degrees they grew ambitious for a more exalted mode of spiritual intercourse; and two mediums, with their hypnotic subjects, made their entry into town, so that hardly a night passed without some ghostly doings--and that, too, in the homes of the best and most cultured families.

To satisfy the increasing demand, it was decided to establish two of the more robust spirits permanently in town, that they might be ready at the lightest summons. Two candidates offered themselves at once for the post--one, the spirit of a traveling wine-seller, the other, the soul of a house-servant, who, it chanced, had been employed by the burgomaster of the town, and thus was especially conversant with the affairs of the inhabitants.



This somewhat dissimilar pair seemed qualified to meet all requirements, and one fine evening they sallied forth. Johann Gruber, the servant, proposed that they take up their quarters in the house of "The Unbelieving Thomas;" for even spirits of coarser mould, becoming accustomed to the stillness of the other world, avoid noisy districts in this.

No more quiet sleeping-place for two sensitive shadows could be found than the lofty, dark coach-house adjoining the stable. The door opening on the court was always ajar, but the dusty floor was never trodden by human foot. An ancient calash stood in the farthest corner, its leathern portions so gnawed away by the rats that it had wasted into the mere skeleton of a carriage.

As soon as Heinrich Müller, the quondam mercantile traveler, beheld this ruin, he declared his wish to become its exclusive possessor. With a soft sigh, evoked by the recollection of his former merry journeyings, he stretched his ethereal form comfortably upon the cushions, from which the leather covering and horsehair had been eaten away, leaving the quills of the feathers sticking through--a circumstance which, unpleasant as it might have proved to an occupant with flesh and bones, in nowise impaired the comfort of this spiritual essence.



Johann Gruber, who in his lifetime had traveled much with his master, found a large chest in another corner, the like of those he had so often packed, and made himself comfortable therein; for upon this first night no seance was in progress.

They soon found that their post was far from easy. Each had his hands full of work. Here, he had to slip into some table and answer the oddest questions; there, he must respond to some crafty or self-deceived medium, or if it were desired, materialize--as the technical term is--and personate this or that well-known individual to gratify the pious curiosity of his surviving friends.

These nightly labors were so fatiguing to both that when they returned to their quarters, and without waiting even to exchange "good-night," slipped into their corners to sleep, they wished themselves back in the state they had left. Indeed, they would probably have renounced the service after a few weeks, had not the arrival of Frau Cordula and her daughter altered the condition of affairs.

From the first, the wine-seller conceived so violent an attachment for the fair, slender girl, that the thought of leaving her for the loveless world of spirit was not to be tolerated. In his lifetime he had been known as a ladies' man; and although he had exchanged his carnal nature for a spiritual existence, he, like all poor souls who hover over the spot where in life they have buried their treasure, could not leave this child of earth, unresponsive though she must ever be to his affection.



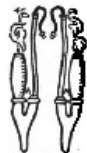
It happened, too, that Johann Gruber, passing one day by accident through a retired street, met an old flame, in the person of the cook who had served in the house of his master. As comely as ever, she formed a new bond to connect him with this earthly sphere. From that day he ceased to chaff his infatuated colleague. Instead of ridicule, a fine ear could now have heard for many a night a duet of tender sighs resounding from the walls of the dark coach-house, and accompanied by the rustling and scrambling of the little mice.



This state of affairs had continued for nearly a year when, one moonlight night, the spirit of Johann Gruber turned homeward from a tiresome day's work. Sleepy though he was, he took a roundabout way, past a certain house, on the ground floor of which his early love had opened a tap-room. Possibly he was further attracted by the winey fragrance which had, in his lifetime exerted a powerful influence over him. He raised himself to a level with the window, the upper sash of which was open, and perching himself upon the crosspiece, took a survey of the room. A stout woman sat behind the bar, and nodded over her knitting, from which she occasionally drew a needle and scratched her frowsy head, yawning the while and rubbing her small, watery eyes.



A little girl was sleeping upon a stool by the stove. Several workmen in their shirt-sleeves sat at a table playing cards. When any of them trumped an ace, they rapped with their knuckles and the little one sighed in her sleep.



The gallant ghost could not suppress a sigh as he reflected how fine it would be if he were still living, and as landlord and husband could scold the stout woman, and send the little Lisa early to bed. But fate had decreed otherwise, and he descended from his lofty seat and flitted homeward through the deserted streets to the haunted house.



Arrived at the gateway he peeped in a moment through the window of the porter's room. There sat Wenzel Kospoth, still bending over his folio. The glow from the lamp silvered his gray head; but his small eyes were closed, so that it was uncertain whether he were napping, or sunk in deep thought. Johann Gruber shrugged his shoulders. He could not endure the valiant old man, because other people regarded him as a magician, and he calmly acquiesced; whereas Johann knew that this attributed power over the spirits of hell was clearly a swindle. His colleague, too, disliked the cobbler, and sometimes threatened to do him harm, indebted though they were to him for their unlighted quarters.

The night wanderer now sought the crevice in the old house-door through which he was accustomed to slip in. But to-night, finding an obstacle, he noticed, for the first, that he was still in the materialized condition in which he had been forced to show himself at the medium's command. Instantly he stripped the garment from his shoulders, like a paletot, saw it dissolve in thin air, and glided unimpeded through the door and across the court.

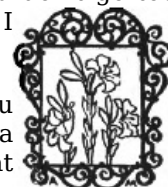


"Good evening, Herr Müller!" said he, in a whisper. "Have you turned in already? Much work to-day?"

Out of the calash in the corner came back a faint echo, which trembled as from inward vexation.

"How often must I tell you, stupid, to go to bed quietly and not disturb well-bred people in their first sleep? You smell of bad liquor again. Have the goodness to keep away from me and creep into your chest!"

"Oho!" snarled the other, approaching his irate companion and settling himself upon a shaft of the carriage. "The deuce take your fine manners! You are no better than I--Spirit is Spirit, and you are on the wrong track when you accuse me of drinking. You know very well we can no longer pour down a draught behind our cravats, for we have no cravats. No, Herr Müller, what you smell is the pure, soul fragrance. Your own is not exactly like violets, either. Why should it be, if it savors of the deeds done in your lifetime? You understand? Take care you don't go too far; for if it should come to blows--I have been a match for more than one when I was at service at the inn of The Three Lilies, and with such a fellow as you--"



"Be still, will you!" commanded the voice from the calash, rather faintly. "You know I meant no harm; it is only because I am so wretched in this dog's life of a professional ghost, and besides that, this confounded love affair, and no rest at night--"

"Yes, indeed, I can well believe it!" sighed the other, easily pacified. "You are even worse off than I, and not so much as a kiss will all this bring you."



It would be a good thing if you would put the girl out of your mind. It's all nonsense, anyway."

A heavy sigh came from the black depths of the wagon frame.

"That you don't understand, I observe. When this maiden, decked with all heavenly charms, crosses my path, I am like a poor moth that cannot keep away from the lamp, although it does not go near it with the exact intention of burning its wings. I often think the priests' invention is not the real hell--as indeed we know; the true one is the suffering which we incur by our earthly sins. More than one little goose of a girl has cried her eyes out over me; a confoundedly handsome fellow I was, with a pocketful of money. Then, out of sight was out of mind with me; but now I am in for it. What I endure is heart-breaking. There is no drinking to the oblivion of this soul-suffering."



He was silent, exhausted by this passionate outburst; and only a slight whimper was audible from the corner. His sympathetic comrade had in the meantime withdrawn to his chest. After a little, he said: "How beautifully you express it all, Herr Müller! Just so it goes with my Rieka. In my lifetime I laughed when I heard them talk of everlasting love. But there is something in it,

after all. Now, if your Gundelchen and my Rieka should come to us up yonder, perhaps we might continue our courting. Perhaps, upon the last day--well, we must wait. In the meantime, good-night! pleasant dreams!"

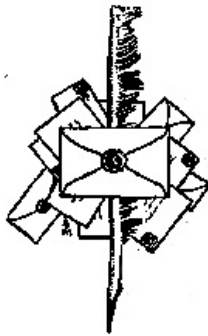


From the carriage in the corner came no answer--only a soft, ghost-like snore. Grief seemed at last to have left the poor sinners to their rest.

But the sleep of the two much-enduring ghosts was to be broken in upon in a strange way that night.

In a little cafe by the market place two good friends and school-fellows were celebrating their *Wiedersehen* with several bottles of Rhine wine. The one, a dignified young man of four-and-twenty, had just returned from a neighboring university, with the degree of Doctor of Medicine. Before accepting the proffered position of assistant in the office of a distinguished physician, he contemplated a year of travel. Following the promptings of his heart, he visited first his native town; though all ties of kindred there had been broken by the death of his parents.

A youthful attachment, formed in his gymnasium days and continued through his student years, despite many breaks and reconciliations, was rumored to be on the point of becoming an engagement. But as yet no word had been spoken; and, indeed, even an exchange of letters had been interdicted by the stern father. The young man had thought of her less than usual this past year, but had excused himself on the ground of absorbing study. Of his old companions, only one, a civil engineer, had settled in the town. This good comrade insisted upon sharing his bachelor quarters with his friend during his stay. They met at the station, the newly-fledged doctor arriving by an evening train; and midnight found them still exchanging experiences at the café whither they had gone for supper.



"You are awaited with impatience, Philip," said the engineer. "Papa Stadtrath asked me yesterday whether you did not intend to display yourself in the full splendor of your new honors to your native town. I answered evasively. You ought not to accept engagements at once, but devote the first two or three days to rest. For, listen! You are looking pale and nervous; the fatigues of your examination show plainly upon your face."

That he had judged correctly of his friend's condition became evident as soon as they left the café. They had drunk but lightly; yet, directly the young doctor found himself in the open air, his head swam, he grew unsteady on his feet and began to talk so boisterously, swinging his walking-stick against the windows as they went along, that his friend, fearing that Philip might meet some acquaintance and introduce himself anew in this disgraceful fashion, took a roundabout way home, through Ghost Lane, where they were sure of being unobserved. Locking his arm in that of his friend, he piloted him along, keeping in the shadow of the aristocratic houses, past the "Good Shepherd," "Noah's Dove," and the "Rose of Sharon," in which no sound was heard and from whose grated windows no light shone forth.

They had just reached the house of "The Unbelieving Thomas," when the riotous young man stood suddenly still, shook himself loose from his friend by a violent gesture, and declared that he was ready to challenge all the spooky spirits of the lane--which he now, for the first time, recognized. He proposed to thrust them through with the weapons of science till they were frightened back into the nebulous nothingness whence only the baldest superstition had suffered them to creep forth. This should be his first service to his native town, which, to its own shame, had tolerated this relic of Egyptian darkness, or worse, of Medievalism, here in its midst, at the end of the nineteenth century.



He struck a defiant attitude on the sidewalk, while with one arm he brandished his stick against possible ghostly opponents and with the other he warded off his friend. In this way he lost his balance and fell against the house, striking his head so forcibly upon the sharp edge of the door-post that a large jet of blood spurted instantly from the wounded temple.



In great consternation his friend attempted to raise him and staunch the wound with his handkerchief, while he called loudly for help. In this last effort he was finally successful, for the narrow window of the porter's room, directly over their heads, was flung open. In a few words the engineer explained to Wenzel Kospoth what had happened. When the trusty Bohemian opened the door and saw the wound by the light of his candle, he shook his head. It would be impossible to convey the young man, bleeding thus profusely, to his home, without giving occasion for much talk. There was no comfortable place for him in his stuffy shop; but it happened that in the rear court lived a friend of his who was skilled in such matters, and they would carry the gentleman to her without arousing the neighborhood.



No sooner said than done. As they crossed the court with their heavy burden, they saw a light shining out of Frau Cordula's windows, one of which was opened in answer to the cobbler's call. But the voice which inquired what was the matter was that of Gundula, who was still awake and busied in finishing off some work for the morrow. Learning what Samaritan service was required of them, she quickly appeared at the door below, clasping her hands in terror as she saw the blood streaming from the young man's forehead. The older woman, too, was not a little disturbed when they laid her patient down before her; but retaining her presence of mind, she directed her daughter to fetch her box of remedies. Out of this she took the necessary articles; then, with fresh water she cleansed the wound, which, fortunately, had not penetrated the bone, pressed the jagged edges firmly together, and closed them with a needle and thread, finishing by binding a soft bandage over the forehead.

During these proceedings the patient had not once regained consciousness, but lay bolstered up with two pillows on an old sofa in the living-room. The woman hobbled about on her two crutches, and from time to time applied cooling bandages to the heated brow.

She assured the two men there was no danger,—the wound would heal in a few days. The friend saw that he was in fact superfluous; and recognizing the skill of the good woman, he renounced his intention of watching during the night, and with heartfelt thanks, withdrew with Wenzel Kospoth.



Noiselessly as all this had taken place, yet the whispers and hurried movements in the coachman's lodgings had not failed to reach the fine ear of Herr Heinrich Müller, and to awaken him. In his dreams his thoughts had been continually with Gundula, and he could not rest in his calash, but must needs peep through the window and witness the assiduity with which she attended the wounded man.



Johann Gruber, in his chest in the corner, would have had no inkling of the adventure had not his ghostly companion returned to the coach-house, when all was again still, and vented his jealous rage in imprecations upon all the living. The hated Bohemian swindler he accused of basely conniving to provide a settlement for the daughter of his friend; and of tripping up the young man in front of his door that the old witch might cure him, and her patient in turn, out of gratitude, pay his court to the girl.

Johann Gruber listened to all this with the utmost tranquility, and yawned so loudly that his colleague turned upon him, and after they had quarreled and hurled bitter words at each other for a time, they fell asleep again from sheer exhaustion.



Late in the morning the doctor awoke. When he unclosed his heavy eyelids and found himself lying upon a strange, poor sort of couch, in an unfamiliar room, he at first believed himself to be still dreaming. How came he in this large, low room, so poorly furnished? On the wall were two oil-chromos—a portrait of the Emperor and a spinach-green landscape,—upon the corner closet stood a wig-block with flaming red cheeks, and not far off was a peasant's chest, painted blue, with white tulips! This surely could not be the bachelor lodgings of his friend! And where was his friend? While he was puzzling himself about the matter, he felt a dull heaviness in his head, and pain in his temples. Mechanically he raised his hand to touch the aching spot, and to his astonishment felt a bandage—at the same instant he heard a halting step and the tapping of two crutches upon the bare, scoured floor, and saw before him the little woman who, while he had slept, had been sitting noiselessly at her work by the window. Now his eyes opened in wonder and his full consciousness returned, while she told him how it was he had claimed their hospitality on the preceding night.



He listened attentively to the good woman, but made no reply, passively allowing her to remove the bandage and inspect the wound, which she found satisfactory; whereupon he declared that he felt quite well, save a slight dizziness and a great emptiness of the stomach, which would be relieved by a proper breakfast. Mother Cordula brought him a glass of water and hastened to her little stove to make him as good a cup of coffee as she was able.

Meanwhile Philip sat upright among his pillows and asked all manner of questions. A great sense of comfort stole over him in this poor room behind the well-mended but snowy curtains, in the company of this simple, sensible woman, whose features were shadowed by a gentle seriousness.

And now the door opened and a young creature came in, stepping lightly on her tiptoes, nodding to the older woman and throwing a passing glance at the stranger.

"My daughter," said the mother, "the gentleman has just waked and would like his breakfast. He is doing well, thank God! Have you brought everything with you?"

The girl, still quite out of breath, assented, and put down her basket upon a chair. Philip saw that it contained various market purchases much more abundant than they would have provided

for their own dinner table. His attention, however, was soon diverted by the young girl, who pleased him uncommonly well. She wore a plain brown dress that must have seen long service; and, as its wearer had not yet done growing, it had been pieced down, quite regardless of the fashion, though even now the slender ankles showed beneath it. She had taken off her hat, a black straw, trimmed with a knot of red, and her pretty face was framed by an abundance of thick, brown braids, out of which a little forest of curling locks had escaped over her neck. As she moved noiselessly to and fro, assisting her mother, she avoided meeting the young man's glance, and spoke softly, as though in the presence of a very sick person, when she answered her mother's questions about her work.



But the most charming thing of all was the way the black eyes, always a trifle downcast, would open suddenly, dart a swift glance around, which seemed to break into lightning-like sparks and then suddenly drop their long lashes again.

Twice only, when Philip directed some playful remark to her, did her red lips break into a smile and a dimple appear in her cheek, showing that behind that modest, almost childlike brow, was a roguish spirit which was only repressed by the consciousness of her lowly position and by considerations of good breeding.

When the mother and daughter sat down to their midday meal other company appeared--first, Master Kospoth, their daily guest, then the young engineer. Both were rejoiced to see such an improvement in the patient; and the friend wished to procure a carriage and convey Philip at once to his own lodgings.

Frau Cordula, however, insisted upon keeping him until the following day. The wound, it is true, had begun to heal; but she herself must renew the bandage several times, and she could not leave her room to visit the patient.

No one was better pleased with this plan than the invalid himself. He maintained that he had never slept better, nor drank better coffee. When the men had gone, and Gundula also, he seated himself upon a little stool by the window where her sewing machine stood, took up her scissors, stuck her little thimble upon his finger, and plunged into a cosy chat with the mother as she sat at the other window with her sewing. He drew from her the story of her life; and the calm way in which she spoke of her sad lot, the cruelty of her neighbors, and recompense for those trials which she had found in her child, touched the heart of her young listener, and awoke in him a feeling akin to veneration. When at length Gundula came home in the evening, she appeared less constrained, and ventured to ask if his wound hurt him, or should she get some ice to cool the wrappings. To this he would not consent, and his gallant protest evoked a slight flush upon her cheek. When she wished to move her machine into the adjoining room lest its noise disturb him, he would not allow this either, but moved a chair near her, and watched her taper fingers and the delicate contour of her face as she bent over her work. The mother, however, remarked that her patient needed to go to sleep early, sent out the child, dressed the wound freshly with salve, and withdrew to the back room.

Outside, in the court, a light shadow had been spying in at the window for an hour past--the poor soul of Heinrich Müller, which was racked by the torments of jealousy, and would not retreat until the young pair, who evidently enjoyed themselves together, were parted once more. That upon this evening, one of the best mediums pursued his vocation without result and failed to call up a single spirit, had its natural explanation in the infatuation which kept this self-declared lady-killer of old a watcher at the window of our simple peasant maid.



The melancholy ghost felt no slight relief when upon the following afternoon his lively rival took leave of his excellent nurse and her daughter and departed for the home of his friend. But the joy was of short duration; for the next evening, as soon as the darkness would allow him to take his way unobserved to Ghost Lane, the young doctor appeared at Frau Cordula's house to have his wound dressed. This time the stitches were removed, and a plaster was applied over the cloth with the healing balsam. He had brought a large cornucopia containing a variety of fruits and confections, at which Gundelchen consented to nibble, after much persuasion. She had now thawed completely, and Philip thought he had never heard a prettier laugh from girlish lips than that which greeted the recital of his student pranks. When, at times, the conversation took a more serious turn, Gundelchen took part shyly, asking any number of sensible questions.

And so it went on the following evenings. Sometimes the engineer came, too, and in the lowly apartment there was such good cheer that they all forgot the hour and had to be reminded by Master Kospoth that they must not overstep the time for closing the great door.



It was not the young people alone who found these evening chats enjoyable; it was good for Frau Cordula as well, to see a bit of life around her once more, and to be able to converse with intelligent people. Still, she could not disguise the fact that a strange alteration had come upon her child; she went about abstractedly all day, and only regained her old-time merriment in the evening to fall again into a reverie when she was alone with her mother.

The wise woman was accordingly glad when one evening she could inform her patient that the wound was almost healed, and that even the scar would soon disappear if he continued to apply the ointment which she gave him in a little jar. She would now take leave of him, as his visits could hardly be concealed if continued much longer, and she herself wished to avoid all gossip among her uncharitable neighbors.

The young man started, and Gundelchen grew as pale as death; but her mother had such a decided way, that there was nothing for them but to part sadly, after Philip had consumed a good five minutes in thanking anew his deliverer, pressing her hand the while. The daughter lighted him out to the head of the steep stairs. As he stood there a minute or two in evident perplexity, wishing to say something, yet still silent, he cast one quick glance at her standing beside him in all her charming confusion, seized her hand and kissed it; then, as she drew back, blushing deeply, and murmured, "But, Herr Doctor!" he threw his arm hastily around her and printed a swift kiss upon her hot cheek, whereupon he rushed down the narrow stairs, and, with a fast-beating heart, strode homeward through the sultry night. Heinrich Müller had fortunately been engaged at a *séance* and had not witnessed this scene. When, a couple of hours later, he looked in at Gundelchen's window, he saw her with wide-open eyes, and a smile on her face, dreaming--but of what he had no suspicion.



On the following day, a servant brought a large, firmly-locked box up the stairs to the little house in the rear court. Gundula had just come in to dinner, and Wenzel Kospoth, too, happened to be present when the box was opened. Within it lay all manner of pretty finery for a young girl, and a warm dress-pattern for an older woman. With it came a note containing the request that they would kindly accept these trifles and thus relieve the sender, in some slight degree, of the weight of obligation which lay upon his heart.

In the lid lay a very modest little brooch. The girl had once complained that she lost all her pins; now the hope was expressed that this little clasp would hold more firmly, and that, at the same time, it would secure the recollection of a true friend.

Wenzel Kospoth shook his gray head and muttered something about a gallant young man who would do the generous thing. But Frau Cordula directed the child to get pen and paper at once, and write down what she should dictate, which was as follows:

She thanked the Herr Doctor many times for his kind intention to give them pleasure; but she could on no account accept these costly presents, as she must of necessity perform her medical services without compensation, if she would not render herself liable to punishment on the charge of unlawful practice. She would therefore return everything at once, and remain the Herr Doctor's

Respectful and devoted servant,

CORDULA EHRENBURG.

When Philip received this message, which was brought him together with the box by a boy from Ghost Lane, he was greatly crestfallen. He knew the simple woman so well that he suffered himself to be deluded by no doubts of her entire sincerity in thus declining all further intercourse. And as he had to confess to himself that he could not seriously think of making her child his wife, and was still less inclined to play with her feelings, he finally concluded, with a deep sigh, to lock fast the chamber of his heart, which was haunted by the image of the witch's child, and to draw a cross over the whole adventure.



At the same time he recalled to himself, for the first time, that he was already half-engaged to another; and he took pains to fan anew the flame of his youthful love, which, in this last week, had died down to an almost imperceptible little spark.



The surest means to this end would be a visit to the house of the Stadtraths. Yet, although he could now, with his scar concealed by a narrow strip of plaster, appear once more as a smart young suitor, he put off the once longed-for interview from day to day, stayed quietly in the house and whiled away the lonely hours when his host was away at business, in a depressing idleness, in desultory reading, smoking and lying on the sofa, in a sort of dream, wherein he could not prevent a certain slender, girlish figure from hovering before his mental eye. Sometimes the long lashes would be raised, and swift little flashes would shoot out from a pair of black, star-like eyes.

But one evening this kind of fireworks grew so uncanny that he sprang up, dressed himself carefully and started for the house of his youthful sweetheart.

On the way, his heart throbbed violently and he with difficulty restrained himself from turning down a side street in the direction of Ghost Lane. But the nearer he drew to his destination the calmer he grew. His fate lay still in his own hands; nothing compelled him to say the decisive word that night--especially as he had his long-intended journey before him. So he mounted the steps of the house with indifference, and with a firm hand pulled the well-known bell.

The daughter of the house opened the door herself, but greeted him with a cool, well-feigned

surprise, as one might a visitor whom he had believed to be a hundred miles away, and ushered him at once into the parlor, where a little circle of family friends was assembled. The father was still at his office, but the mother, who had always petted the young man as if he were the legacy of her deceased friend, exhibited this evening a stiff, reserved manner, congratulated him upon successfully passing his last examination, inquired how long he expected to remain in the city, and addressed him once and again as Herr Doctor. He noticed at once that the conversation which he had interrupted had been concerned with himself, but he maintained his composure and excused his deferred visit on the ground of an accident which had befallen him--he had made a false step and had fallen, striking his head against a stone; on which account he had been for several days under a physician's care.

No one expressed, save for mere politeness' sake, any regret at this, and the conversation dragged itself wearily along.

Philip had leisure to observe the daughter of the house, as she sat near him, her little nose tilted high in the air, and her lips pursed up ironically. She had been so frequently told that she was the prettiest girl in town, she had been so unquestionably the queen of the ballroom for three winters, that it seemed a mere matter of course that everyone should pay homage to her youthful highness; and especially did she expect it of her old playmate who had been used to bring her the most bouquets at every cotillon. Moreover, in spite of his disfigured forehead, he pleased her better than all her other society slaves, and she had in secret decided that if he should prove himself worthy of the honor, she would make him overwhelmingly happy by the bestowal of her favor upon him. And now to have him sit there by her side, as impassive as a block of wood, was unpardonable; and she resolved within her cold little heart that he should feel her righteous anger.



The changed deportment of her prospective son-in-law was still more annoying to the high-spirited Frau Stadtrath, who had fancied that the long-awaited betrothal, for which she already had in readiness a touching and impressive speech, would take place at the earliest opportunity. The presence of the other ladies at this time seemed to her most undesirable; and as she continued to hope that Philip's evidently adverse humor proceeded from the fact that he could not meet Rosa alone, she made several awkward attempts to get rid of the company. As these were thwarted by the general curiosity to see more of the young doctor, she broke in at last with the words: "You never would have guessed, my dear Doctor, that during this last year, while you have been away, we could make such progress in all kinds of occult science and maintain such a lively intercourse with the world of spirit. Instead of the regular evening card-playing, we now question this round table about many things we wish to know; and even I, who at the beginning was quite incredulous, have been gradually converted. I see you shrug your shoulders; of course, modern natural science regards all spiritualistic experiments as so many humbugs, and as it is quite true that much deception does creep in, I will not allow any medium or hypnotist to cross my threshold. But a wooden table--what interest could that have in leading us astray, especially as we are able to control its oracles?"



"And have these ghostly revelations always been found reliable and correct by you?" inquired Philip--careful lest his words betray the scorn he felt.

"Not always; of course, sometimes the answers sound ambiguous, sometimes they are wide of the mark, and then again they hit it so exactly that no one could doubt their supernatural origin. Heaven knows, one cannot expect a departed spirit to be omniscient; and you know well that a fool--I beg the company's pardon--a fool can ask more questions than ten of the wisest tables can answer. But you shall judge for yourself, my dear Doctor. Rosa has already enjoyed anticipating the kind of face you would make if you were once to attend such a sitting."

"I beg you will leave me out of the game, Frau Stadtrath," said Philip, evasively. "I fear the tips of my fingers lack the necessary fluid, and I should only frustrate your design if I were to form one of the chain."

"No, no!" put in the daughter, hastily. "You must take part; otherwise you will think the thing is not done honestly and that each of us finds his sport in deceiving the rest. Come, now, and try for yourself to thwart the thing. You will see that the table will always have the last word."

The tea service and cloth were accordingly removed forthwith, and the seven or eight persons who sat around the circular table closed the magic chain with their outstretched hands, and waited with suppressed impatience the things which should come to pass.

Philip's little finger rested with a light pressure upon that of his fair young neighbor; but though, formerly, such a tender proximity would have sent a glow of warmth through his veins, to-day he remained quite cool as though he were merely waiting until the reputed magic fluid should stream from the slender hand near his own and animate the lifeless wood.



Now, it happened that on this evening our old acquaintance, Heinrich Müller, had undertaken the spiritualistic duties in this house, although he usually reserved himself for commissions of a higher order. But upon the preceding evening his more ignorant colleague had been put to rout so ignominiously that he would not expose himself soon again to a like experience. At the request of the assembled company, the medium had called up the spirit of Napoleon, and had propounded

to it all kinds of historical questions. Now, as Johann Gruber, in his former capacity of house-servant, had known nothing of the great Corsican, and, indeed, had only heard his name when the talk had turned upon Napoleon-players--of whom he had had occasion to eject several from the inn when in the service of its landlord--he gave such startling and distorted answers that the leading spiritualist was overcome with embarrassment, and finally bade him go to the devil, while he explained to the questioners that the spirit had played one of his scornful jokes upon them because he was very angry at being dragged down to earth again from his heavenly exaltation.



Heinrich Müller, on the contrary, who had more culture and was never at a loss to furnish some ambiguous solution for difficult questions, responded to the summons from the Stadtrath's house the more willingly in that he had seen his rival enter it, and burned to play him a trick.

For this an opportunity was soon afforded. For, when he had slipped into the table and had announced his presence by raising one foot and stamping softly, the Fräulein Rosa, after some inconsequential skirmishing, asked directly whether he knew that a strange guest had inserted himself into the chain.

"Yes," answered the table, to the great satisfaction of the believing.

Did he know his name?

"Philip," rapped the table foot.

Did he know where this Philip had been staying since he came to town?

"Ghost Lane," spelled the table, without reflecting that this would be a surprise to the company; for what should a young physician just returned home have to call him to that ill-omened street?

And so the Fräulein, for she alone had noticed the strange flush mount to her neighbor's face, inquired promptly what had taken him thither; and forthwith the table-spirit stamping the foot by a violent motion, rapped out:

"A love affair!"



The impression which this word made was so strong that the chain at once parted, and all eyes were turned toward the young man, who concealed his embarrassment by a scornful laugh and remarked that such scandalous jokes proved to him plainly that they were bent upon teasing him, and the innocent table had been forced into the plot.

However, Fräulein Rosa, who had kept a sharp eye upon him, grew crimson, not from shame, but from righteous indignation, that her heretofore obedient and submissive subject had allowed himself to be led into such a course of treachery. Accordingly she commanded the circle to form again instantly, and while her trembling little finger betrayed all her emotion to her neighbor at the table, she put the decided question: "For whom in Ghost Lane has Dr. Philip conceived a tender feeling?" The table answered immediately: "G-u-n-d-e-l-chen!"



"Gundelchen!" said the questioner, spelling the word after it, and she drew back her hand as though she had touched a wet frog. "Well, Herr Doctor, do you require any further evidence? And so it is really that frivolous little person, the daughter of that disreputable old woman!--you remember, mamma, don't you? our seamstress brought the little country girl to our house with her once to help with the sewing--a creature entirely without culture. And to her you have actually paid court, Herr Doctor, and have found her society so interesting that you have neglected your oldest friends for it?"

With flaming eyes she hurled these reproaches at him, in her rash excitement never stopping to consider that she thus disclosed the deep, hidden wound in her own heart. But the others divined it, and her mother made her a sign with her eyes that she should control herself. To Philip it was a matter of indifference whether his young friend, whose face at this moment appeared to him distorted by passion and almost hateful, thus laid bare her feelings in her jealous anger. His only concern was to refute the unfounded and malignant suspicions which had attached to the good woman in Ghost Lane.



He therefore exclaimed with quiet firmness that he would hear nothing against the mother and daughter. It was with gross injustice they had been termed "disreputable;" and whoever called the young girl "frivolous," clearly could not know her. Here he related with frank ingenuousness how he had made their acquaintance and come to be under obligations of gratitude to these good Samaritans.

When he had finished his recital, Fräulein Rosa stood up and said with a trembling voice: "There is no disputing about tastes. I understand now that for this whole fortnight you had no wish to look up your nearest friends, because you were lost in admiration of these two pearls. As people of our own station can bear no comparison with them, I would prefer to withdraw, that

you need not be too long detained from your evening visit to Ghost Lane."

Whereat, she curtesied with a very grand air to the young man, bowed to the others, and withdrew to the adjoining room.

The rest of the company sat, as if turned to stone, in the stillness which ensued. Finally, the Frau Stadtrath, in her dire dismay, said: "You must excuse this little burst of temper, my dear Doctor. She at one time conceived an antipathy for the little sewing-girl, and cannot understand how one of the dearest friends of her youth can feel otherwise. And besides, you, with your chivalric notions, put too much warmth into your defense. If you will go after our Rosa and say that you did not really mean--"

"I regret, gracious lady," interrupted Philip, rising, "that it is impossible for me to take back a word of what I have said in favor of the two so misunderstood. If your daughter cannot tolerate the society of a man who interests himself in two people, unjustly accused, I must renounce all further intercourse with this friendly household, from whom I was formerly the recipient of so much kindness. I have the honor to wish the ladies and gentlemen Good-evening."

With that he took his hat, bowed, and left the room.



When he found himself in the open air, such a feeling of relief came over him at his escape from the stifling atmosphere of this respectable Philistine house, that, forgetting his new professional dignity, he waved his hat, made a leap into the air, and hummed a student song to himself. A couple of the neighbors who knew him, and his status with the fair daughter of the Stadtraths, smiled, as he passed by them unheeding, and whispered to each other that it had probably just been settled between the young pair, and the gentleman was a trifle exhilarated by the betrothal wine. But Philip was eager to get out of the dark streets into open space, and drew a deep breath when he reached the shaded park which lay along the river, and was peopled in the daytime by the children of the town and their nurses. At this late hour, however, only solitary pairs of lovers walked here, and their shadows, as they glided past, moved the lonely wanderer to melancholy reflections. He seated himself on a bench and for a long time gazed upward through the gently swaying branches at the stars, from which a soft coolness flowed down upon him. With a hushed sound, the river rolled along at his feet. Philip could not but think how delightful it would be to let himself be carried away by the current, in a boat, with a certain being at his side, all through the night, only to land at the first flush of morning near some secluded little house, and there to set up his own hearthstone. The image of little Gundula came before him so lifelike, she appeared with all her gifts and graces in so bright a light, that he could not conquer his longing to take the fair form in his arms; and springing up, he set out in a straight line for the town again, resolved to make his way that very evening into the haunted house, cost what it might, and have a serious talk with Frau Cordula concerning the present and the future.



But when he had passed the outlying districts of the town, and was nearing his goal, he noticed an unwonted commotion in the streets--a running and shouting of men who at the hour of ten are usually sitting at home, or over their beer. He made inquiry and heard with alarm that a fire had broken out in Ghost Lane. And now he rushed on ahead of all the others, and as he reached the street and saw the glow of the fire lighting up the black houses, he made a way for himself by elbowing and pushing through the dense crowd that blocked the entrance. But the people stood idly by gaping at the spot whence the red blaze shot upwards, so that Philip had no difficulty in fighting his way through them to the seat of the mischief. His fearful surmise had not led him astray--the house of "The Unbelieving Thomas" was really on fire, and the flames, which until now had issued only from the porter's room, were just beginning to encircle the old entrance gate. The men who stood in front of it, in a half circle, pointed to the fiery spectacle with stupid indifference, or even with malicious grins. A few even gave vent to jeers: it was time that Satan at last laid hold of the old witchmonger by the collar; perhaps he had been trying to make gold, and a flame from hell had shot up out of the crucible and singed his head. It could not be expected that any good Christian would put out such a fire, and thus arrest the judgment of Heaven.



As soon as Philip reached the house, and took in the situation, he shouted to the bystanders to get axes and break in the door and rescue those who lived back in the court. Not a foot stirred; only a pair of saucy tongues gave it as their opinion that it would be no harm if the whole pack of witches were burned, too--they had deserved a funeral pile this long time;--a sentiment which was greeted with general laughter. The young man heard this with a throb of rage; and casting about him for some implement with which he could burst open the door, he seized a beam which the pavers had left lying at the edge of the sidewalk, and with superhuman exertion dragged the burden to the entrance that with it he might batter in the woodwork of the door, which was already ignited; when the rotten lock, as of a miracle, yielded of itself in the sockets, and the door swung slowly inward on its hinges. In the dark opening appeared a strange pair of human figures. Gundelchen was carrying her mother pick-a-pack through the smoke and showering sparks out into the open

air.

The child had gone to bed earlier than usual that night, weary with her day's work, and was awakened by a cry of terror from her mother, who had not yet fallen asleep. When she perceived the light from the fire, she put on a skirt, threw a shawl around her shoulders, and without stopping for shoes or stockings, with swift decision she lifted her mother, who could move but slowly, to her back and bore her down the little stairs and across the court, there to stand a few agonizing moments in the dark hallway until her guardian angel opened the house door.

As she stood now outside, bent under her living burden and looking around at the crowd as it fell back, she espied their young friend and guest, who, with a cry of joy, dropped the beam and sprang toward her. A happy smile crossed her flushed face and the fresh lips faltered: "Good evening; Herr Doctor"--simple words enough, but they sounded to him like sweetest music. He could only say: "Thank God! O Gundelchen! To think that you are alive!" and would have caught them both in his arms but for the eyes which were turned upon them.

She had not yet put down her burden, and seemed uncertain whither to turn with it. In vain did Philip conjure the people to fetch a wheelbarrow, or even a push-cart. They turned away, shrugged their shoulders and murmured imprecations.

"Well, we must get one ourselves, Gundelchen, since these pious Christians cannot summon this much of neighborly kindness," said the young man, as he set the woman gently down upon the pavement, and, crossing his hands with those of the girl, raised the mother again on this swinging litter, bidding her put her arms around their necks. So they carried her submissively obedient, through the parting throng, which fell back at their approach, down the street as far as the marketplace. There, as by accident, an empty cab came rattling sleepily along. Philip hailed it, put the two women into it, and swung himself up on the seat behind, telling the coachman to drive to a little inn by the river, a half mile distant, which served as the terminus for the summer evening walks of the better class families.



From Ghost Lane, which grew even ruddier with the glare of the fire, sounded a duller hum and tumult; and now they heard the roll of the hose-cart, which was at last on its way to the scene of the fire. From all sides, great and small were flocking to the ill-omened street; but soon they had left the last houses behind them and were driving along at a slow trot, through the starlit night.



And now, for the first, the young doctor had time to regard the rescued pair more closely. The older woman, with closed eyes, lay back in one corner of the carriage as though she would collect her thoughts, and thank Heaven for the miracle of her deliverance. Her child sat beside her, a little ashamed of her own scanty attire, holding the shawl tightly about her shoulders and saying no word to the young man opposite. But the black eyes met his steadily, and only once, when the bare feet came into view beneath the short skirt, did the long lashes droop hastily. Philip asked if she were cold. She shook her head, but he drew his handkerchief from his pocket and wound it about her slender ankles. Then he stretched out his hand and she laid her own in it, with a charming look of confidence, and so they held each other's hands in a mute pledge until the carriage drew up before the little hostelry.

Here first the mother opened her eyes, but spoke no word and suffered Philip to lift her out and carry her into the house. Host and hostess were not a little astonished when they saw their singular guests, for whom the young man engaged a room in the upper story. He gave the landlord a gold piece and told him it would be to his advantage to attend carefully to the ladies, whom he had rescued from great peril by fire in the city.

The Frau Wirthin would help the Fräulein out with her wardrobe. Then he himself mounted to the room where Frau Cordula sat in an arm-chair, looking dreamily before her. He went up to her and said gravely: "Dear mother, I must leave you now and go back to the city. But first I want to clear up an important matter. Your daughter and I have silently plighted our troth during the journey hither. I beg now that you will give us your blessing. I promise to be a faithful husband to your child and a loving son to you."

The mother had listened to him with no change of manner, quite as if she had been prepared for something similar. Now she shook her head gently and said: "Dear Herr Doctor, you are very good, and I believe that you are sincere in your request. Still, I am an old woman, and must keep a cool head when the fire of enthusiasm has so heated your young one that you regard as proper and practical what is, and must remain, an impossibility. You are a young man of education and wealth, and we are poor people. How could you answer your friends if they should ask you why you had played the fool over the daughter of a poor tailoress who is denounced as a witch?"

"That is *my* affair," returned Philip with emphasis; "and I shall take care to express myself



quite clearly and plainly on the subject. Moreover, I take delight in setting all my acquaintances to wondering and shaking their heads in a knowing way; indeed, I shall enjoy all the talk and sensation which will be created in the church when the announcement of our betrothal is made from the chancel. In three weeks, therefore, so it please you, the wedding will take place. I propose then to take the young Frau Doctor upon a tour, and we shall spend a whole year in travel. She will thus have time to become somewhat accustomed to society, and to receive that polish which even the costliest jewels must have in order that they may be estimated at their true value. In the meantime, our dear mother will remain quietly in the apartments which will be provided for her in my new home; and her daughter, let us hope, will keep her informed, by frequent letters, that she was not deceived when she thought proper to try her arts of witchery upon a certain Doctor Philip."



He bent down and kissed the mother upon both cheeks, down which two tears trickled silently. Then, drawing the radiant girl to his breast, he kissed her upon lips and eyes; and before either of them could breathe a word, he rushed downstairs, flung himself into the carriage and drove back to town.



The house of "The Unbelieving Thomas" was burned out so completely during the night that when morning dawned only the four black walls, like the sides of some deep shaft or well, remained standing; while the chestnut-tree lay, a heap of ashes, in the court, and only a few smoking ruins covered the site of the coach-house. In the porter's room were found a pile of blackened human bones, and among them four bits of copper which had bound the corners of the large Bohemian Bible, and had not been melted, despite the intense heat.

High above, on the pointed ridge of one of the neighboring houses, sat, in the early gray of the morning, the two former occupants of the coach-house, both in the worst possible humor.

Heinrich Müller cast a savage glance at the wet debris of the charred timbers, from which rose an ill-smelling vapor.

"Well, the comedy is ended!" he said, shaking himself. "I am glad that no one suspected who was the author."

"Not you, after all, Herr Heinrich?" inquired his comrade, who was looking away over the roofs into one of the side streets.

"To be sure; I myself, and no other," returned the illustrious wine-seller. "You must know, Johann, that after I had played that base fellow, the Doctor, a trick, and had separated him and the well-bred daughter of, the Stadtrath, I flew towards home. There I saw the other one, who is like poison to me, the Bohemian, bending as usual over his book of magic; I slipped in, and then it occurred to me that I would spoil his broth for him. I overturned his lamp, the oil ran out over the table, there was an explosion, and as the old fool did not know how to save himself at once, the whole affair went up in smoke. So I have wreaked my vengeance on the wretched cobbler, and now I shall sail back to our upper world straightway. Of hell upon earth, I've had my fill. It may be confoundedly tedious, up there; but what of that? Doomsday cannot be far distant, if one may judge by the mad goings-on down here."



He raised himself a little, as though about to take flight.

"Do take me with you, Herr Heinrich!" said the poor soul of Johann Gruber. "I, too, am out of conceit with everything down here. I'm ready to give up the seance. For yesterday, when I went to look after my Rieka, I found her in--well, I will not say what company. It's accursedly mean business--playing this sort of a spirit--and I thought it would be such capital fun! Some one else can take his turn at it now, when stupid people are bent upon having communications. Look, Herr Heinrich, the sun is just flashing up from behind the mountain yonder. We must make haste and begone before it grows hot. When I was in the service of my former master I was always in the harness before daybreak. Hoop-la!" and he was off without waiting for his companion, who rose slowly after him, casting one more look of malicious satisfaction upon the smoking ruins, beneath which lay buried the poor victim of his revenge.







\*\*\* END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK AT THE GHOST HOUR. THE HOUSE OF THE UNBELIEVING THOMAS \*\*\*

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